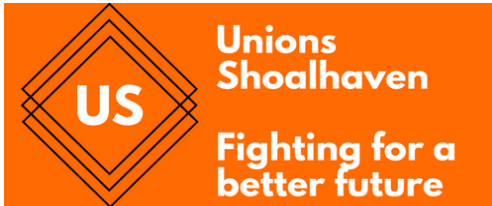


Submission
No 274

**INQUIRY INTO HEALTH OUTCOMES AND ACCESS TO
HEALTH AND HOSPITAL SERVICES IN RURAL,
REGIONAL AND REMOTE NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Unions Shoalhaven

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Submission to Committee on

Health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote New South Wales

WHO ARE WE

Unions Shoalhaven is a recognised District Committee of the South Coast Labour Council. We are non-partisan and campaign around matters of interest to working people and the community. We meet monthly and hold information stalls not only in the Nowra CBD but in the different villages/towns within the Shoalhaven and have travelled as far as Bega.

THE CAMPAIGN

We agreed to help promote a Petition to the NSW Parliament, raised by Nina Digiglio, Independent Councillor for Shoalhaven City Council. This petition has been on our Street Stall in Nowra CBD since October 2020 and we believe that to date 4000 signatures have been added to this petition.

As a result of this community consultation, Unions Shoalhaven has had an opportunity to test the views of the community members on the subject of the proposed redevelopment of the hospital.

Unions Shoalhaven has been canvassing within the community on a regular basis and there are serious reasons why the existing site is too compromised to accommodate the building of a comprehensive best-practice hospital to meet the needs of the whole population of the Shoalhaven region.

The existing hospital has outgrown the site and its capacity. That is why it has one of the highest listings of 'bed-block' – the lack of acute medical and aged care beds. This leads to the highest waiting lists for public surgery, as recovery beds are not available. (Bureau of Health Information in its Healthcare Quarterly, Jul-Sept 2020, lists 356 days wait for non-urgent median (increase of 102 days).

Other listed deficiencies are:

- Hopes of a permanent full time fracture clinic as part of Shoalhaven District Hospital. While the hospital offers a weekly fracture clinic each Wednesday, people with bone breaks are routinely transferred to Wollongong, where they are referred to the Illawarra fracture clinic.
- Big problem at the Hospital is the shortage of medical and surgical beds.

- Outdated Operating Theatres
- Access to Women's Health Services in the Shoalhaven and South Coast
- Children having to go to Sydney for after care from procedures, e.g. tonsillectomy and the costs involved for parents re accommodation costs.
- The current hospital is difficult to access.
- Ambulance drivers, and motorists are fed up with access problems.
- Our most vulnerable and our youth deserve a Mental Health Pathway with timely access to support which in the future is cost effective.
- Clinical Pathways based on Best Practice Outcomes in Acute Mental health.
- Justice Health admissions to the ED should have a safe pathway to ensure reduction in disruption of inmates to the General public receiving treatment in Emergency.
- There is no Detox centre in the Shoalhaven given our high rate of Drug & Alcohol admissions.
- Evidence suggests that people treated in their local area have better health outcomes being close to home and family that being treated out area where risk for re-uptake occurs.
- Holiday makers make use of all our infrastructure including our hospital.
- Our local residents are ageing and are unable to go to Sydney or Wollongong to have procedures that our specialists can perform here except they require the resources, equipment and space to do it.
- The Shoalhaven has long been identified as a stroke and heart disease hotspot due to its aging population, making accessibility to a hospital with a neurological specialist and an MRI vital to recovery rates. Shoalhaven currently possesses neither, and the closest hospital for these patients is in Wollongong.
- Inadequate Stroke Services with no access to anti-thrombotic therapy post CVA caused by a clot which can markedly reduce stroke deficits if given within the first 2 hours of a CVA. Currently people of the Shoalhaven have significant time delays for clot retrieval times rendering them with deficits that could be prevented that can reduce risk of permanent paralysis and reduce risk of nursing home admissions.
- Better cardio. Specialist Cardiologist is requesting a Catheter Lab which is required so cardiologists can practice and prevent our Cardiologists sending our residents to Sydney or Wollongong for stents etc.
- Nuclear Medicine Department for proper diagnostic tools
- No ENT Surgeon at the hospital. Locals travel to Wollongong or the Private hospital only if they can afford it!
- Physiotherapists are unable to see as many in-out patients due to lack of space. Physiotherapy and Rehab service departments are old, out dated and require proper planning to ensure allied health service delivery is able to be provided in a safe, spacious and healthy environment.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Since the September budget announcement of funds for the re-development of the existing hospital much concern has been expressed on the subject of why an alternative proposal for the establishment of a NEW Hospital on an identified Greenfields site has not been considered.

There are serious reasons why the existing site is too compromised to accommodate the building of a comprehensive best- practice hospital to meet the needs of the whole population of the Shoalhaven region.

The existing hospital has outgrown the site and its capacity. That is why it has one of the highest listings of 'bed-block' – the lack of acute medical and aged care beds. This leads to the highest waiting lists for public surgery, as recovery beds are not available.

Unions Shoalhaven believe that the Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital has an opportunity to be built as a New Hospital on a Greenfields site.

Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital is the main acute care hospital for the Shoalhaven region, providing emergency care, medical, surgical and orthopedic services.

The hospital has an Intensive Care Unit (13 beds) focusing on high dependency and coronary patients. There is a Children's Ward and Maternity Unit as well as a purpose built regional Cancer Care Centre and a sub-acute Mental Health Unit.

The number of beds/treatment spaces in the Emergency Department is 16

Number of beds for admitted patients is believed to be between 100 and 200. Bureau of Health Information in their healthcare Quarterly, Jul-Sept 2020 stated that the admitted patient activity at Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital for all bed days (for Acute, Non-acute & Mental Health) was 16,167 a 12% decrease from the same period in 2019. This averages out to 175 beds.

The hospital serves a population which has been forecasted to reach 104,634 in 2020 and growing to 126,513 by 2041. (forcast.id.com.au>shoalhaven)

The Hospital was constructed back in 1919. The Hospital is no longer centrally located. The town of Nowra is congested and access for emergency services are hindered by traffic. Residents are frustrated by parking and traffic issues and the new car parking facility built at a cost of \$11.8 million provides an additional 220 parking spaces and charges \$3 (15min-1hr), \$5 (1-2hours), \$6(2-3hours), \$7 (3-4 hours) and \$8 (more than 4 hours). Concession parking is available.

On 1st November 2018, the NSW Government announced that Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital will be redeveloped to significantly improve healthcare services for residents of the South Coast. The \$434 Million redeveloped Shoalhaven Hospital will see significant community benefits which are likely to include:

- expanded elective surgery
- more surgical, acute medical and aged care beds

- expanded maternity services
- more operating theatres
- increased capacity in the Emergency Department
- Expansion of outpatient and ambulatory care zones.
- Minister for Mental Health Tanya Davies said the NSW Government is committed to providing better access to mental health care. “It’s crucially important to see mental health services integrated into modern hospital developments as part of NSW Health’s core business, which is why I am so pleased as part of this \$434 redevelopment, mental health facilities will be expanded,” Mrs. Davies said.
- The redevelopment of Shoalhaven Hospital is in addition to the NSW Government’s \$251 million commitment to rebuild Shellharbour Hospital.

It was reported on 18th November 20 by the Minister for Health, Brad Hazzard that the NSW Government will invest an additional \$4 million to **fast track** the redevelopment of Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital.

On 18th November 20 the Minister also announced that the Illawarra Community was a step closer to having a new world-class \$700 million Shellharbour Hospital, with the search now on for the ideal site.

On 2nd October 2020 the Minister announced that a concept design for the new, seven storey Acute Services Building for John Hunter and John Hunter’s Children’s hospitals has been unveiled, marking a milestone for the NSW Government \$780 million health precinct. Early works on the new Acute Services Building are expected to commence in 2021 with main works construction scheduled to commence in 2022.

In December 2020, the NSW Government announced the site location for the new \$200 million Eurobodalla Health Service in south-east Moruya.

In the NSW Government's 2017-18 budgets the new Tweed Hospital on a Greenfield site was estimated to cost \$582 million.

The project is "in the planning stage" according to a Health Infrastructure spokesperson and with this in mind, it would seem that a new hospital would better serve the community of the Shoalhaven.

GEOGRAPHICS

Shoalhaven, although designated a city, is a dispersed region spread over 125 kilometers of coastline. Shoalhaven is a large area and a population growing exponentially and one that trebles in holiday season. The vast majority of its population located in the north-east around Nowra suburbs and surrounds, Jervis Bay, Sussex Inlet, Ulladulla and Far South to North Durras.

Research shows best-practice future mapping should allow for 80 per cent of the population to live within a 20-minute drive, or a 20-kilometre radius, of a hospital, with the Emergency Medicine Journal stating mortality rates for people living less than 10km away from a hospital, is decidedly lower than those between 10-20km, and further than 20km. Many of our towns and villages do not reach this standard.

For chest pain the mortality rate for someone living within 10km is 5.5 per cent, respiratory problems 10 per cent and injury through poisoning, asphyxiation or haemorrhage is around two per cent. Other reasons for death was about seven per cent.

In comparison those in a 10-20km radius of hospital for the same problems, chest pain percentage is about 5.5 per cent, respiratory problems is around 13 per cent while injury through poisoning, asphyxiation or haemorrhage was around two per cent. Other reasons for death was about 11 per cent.

For those further than 20km chest pain increased to about seven per cent, respiratory problems jumped to 20 per cent while injury through poisoning, asphyxiation or haemorrhage was around 3.5 per cent. Other reasons for death was also 11 per cent.

WHY BUILD ON A GREENFIELDS SITE

To build a new Hospital on a Greenfields site further down the highway, would allow the communities to have better access to a hospital that in many cases would help to reach the compliance of best-practice. The site that has been identified is the BTU/Forest Road location which has four high speeds (east, west, north, and south) all weather access roads.



Open air space for helicopter access. Nearby fixed wing aircraft facilities. Space to co-locate with private, education and accommodation facilities.

Geographical data does not support the current location for a hospital - the site is stranded between the river and the immediate residential area and is not sufficiently flexible for a modern state-of-the-art hospital supported by 24/7 helicopter air ambulance operations which overfly a large portion of the densely populated Nowra urban area at any hour.

This would allow the existing hospital site to continue uninterrupted operations while a new Greenfield hospital site is established.

By remaining on the present site a considerable additional unnecessary expense will be demolition and interruptions to existing services.

CONCLUSION

The community deserves to have a hospital that is built for purpose and accommodates the health needs of its population. Concerns about completion timeframes if a new hospital was chosen over current upgrade plans, is we believe unjustified as has been seen in other areas building a new hospital on a Greenfields site. Independent MLC, Justin Field was quoted in the South Coast Register dated 10th December 2020 as saying:

“If the Shoalhaven hospital redevelopment is not due to be completed for seven to eight years there is time for the community to be meaningfully engaged in discussion of whether we want a redevelopment of the current hospital or to redirect that money to a new Greenfield site.”

He also said:

“The government has made it very clear post budget that they're restating their commitment to the redevelopment of the site but if it's not going to be completed for eight years let's get real.”

A continued development at the present site would impact on the development of Scenic Drive and along the river foreshore in many creative ways as well as hindering public access back onto the recreation area and reconnecting it to the Nowra Showground and Paringa Park.

Independent MLC Justin Field also added in the South Coast Register on 10th December 20 that:

"The \$4 million allocated in the budget, according to the government release after the budget is to go towards the purchasing the park next to the current hospital to facilitate expansion.

"The loss of a significant community space has not been subject to any meaningful community consultation. It is proof the government is trying to fit its round development in a square hole."

Of course, facilities like the Shoalhaven Cancer Care Centre and the GP Super Clinic would have to remain on site - however they would be complemented with the consolidation of the various other health facilities.

A new location would bring a better hospital offering more essential services, beds and improved accessibility. Band-Aid fixes do not work and hospital improvements should be done once and done right and we have an opportunity to do this and not hinder or delay any improvements to the development of our public hospital needs.

Thank You for taking the time to read this submission.

Sincerely Yours
Patricia David
Secretary
Unions Shoalhaven

12th December 2020